Recognizing and *Undisciplining* Feminist Geography in the Anglo-Caribbean

The aim of this piece is to provide an overview of the state of feminist geography in the Anglo-Caribbean. In doing so via the metaphor of a *gayap*, we provide a précis of work that has been completed by feminist geographers across the region; offer an analysis of the historical, structural, and institutional obstacles of why it is not more robust; and propose that it can be seen across the region via an *undisciplined* and anti-orthodox standpoint. In addition, we review how Caribbean feminist scholarship and praxis contributes to feminist geographies through analyses of how people in the region, particularly women, are contesting, negotiating, disrupting, and responding to prevailing heteropatriarchal ideologies across differing social contexts and political arrangements within the Caribbean.

Keywords: feminist geography, postcolonial geography; Caribbean; Anglo-Caribbean; knowledge production; activism

Defining the Caribbean and Anglo-Caribbean

Clear definitions and precise locations are always helpful to have on-hand when it comes to discussing matters of both scholarship and geography. Unfortunately, offering an equally absolute and all-encompassing encapsulation of where and what the "Caribbean" is, much like defining and demarcating the Anglo-Caribbean, is a virtual impossibility. Nevertheless, situating places, as peculiar as that may sound, is necessary given that cut-and-dry answers to academic questions about them rarely exist. Places, just as terms, are simply too relative, relational, and polysemic. Thus, for the purposes of this article on the state of feminist geography in the Anglo-Caribbean, we will start by describing the Caribbean and then zoom in on our more specific focus.

The Caribbean can be thought of as an unfixed, dynamic, and diasporic place comprised of a vibrant mélange of pluralistic and ever-evolving histories, geographies, cultures, ecosystems, peoples, identities, and spiritualities. Historically, one colloquial phrase offered about the region is that it encompasses those countries and territories "whose shores are washed by the Caribbean Sea." As quaint and picturesque as it sounds, this definition is limiting because it does not account for the region's diaspora, as well as offers little in the way of capturing the political, environmental, and economic dynamics that are operating within-and-across differing Caribbean sites and situations. Similarly, it tacitly includes countries, locales, and communities in South, Central, and North America that typically are not thought of as Caribbean or may not even identity as such. There is also the issue of the "West Indies," an historical and perceptual signifier owing itself to the folly and violence of Columbus and other European intruders. Traditionally, the West Indies referred to the Lucayan Archipelago and islands constituting both the Greater and Lesser Antilles. Its current use builds upon those island chains, as well as loosely denotes mainland associations to places along the Gulf Coast and some countries connected to the outer boundaries of the Caribbean Basin (e.g. Guyana). While its origin will forever be symbolic of the manifold blunders of colonizers, the "West Indies" has been appropriated and transformed to a certain degree as it is

still regularly used as a cultural and ethnic identifier, not to mention source of pride (e.g. West Indies cricket) across the region.

The Caribbean is furthermore made distinct by its shared yet variegating pre-colonial, post-independent, postcolonial, and neocolonial experiences, as well as its strong historical-ongoing connections to people and places in Africa, South Asia, and other colonially-infiltrated and shattered geographies. Notably, and possibly the image that pops into one's mind when hearing the term "Caribbean" least, are the Indigenous peoples, histories, and worldviews of the region. When taking all of this into account, the Caribbean is undoubtedly a social geography characterized by hybridity, heterogeneity, and haunting, as much as it is by erasure, exploitation, and emancipation. As both a physical and cultural region, it engenders migration, movement, and settlement, as well as diversity, dispersion, and myriad discussions of "roots." Indeed, the Caribbean defies both static delineation and fixed definition, and thinking about the region as a place pushes the imagination. This all makes describing the Caribbean, along with its attendant harmonies, paradoxes, conflicts, ambiguities, and range, an exercise in both complexity and qualification.

Not dissimilar regarding its intractability vis-á-vis concise definition, is the Anglo-Caribbean. A perhaps more slightly discernable sub-region whose origins stem from the predatory transgressions of British and later American imperialists, the Anglo-Caribbean includes English-speaking countries situated within the Caribbean. At times, it is referred to as the "Commonwealth Caribbean," however this term too is partial due to the exclusions it makes regarding territories and constituencies controlled by Western governments that also promote or have imposed English as a language (U.S.A., France, the Netherlands). Stretching from as far north as The Bahamas to as far south as Guyana, the Anglo-Caribbean most readily incorporates the following countries: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. In addition, the following British Overseas Territories are often included in the sub-region as well: Anguilla, Bermuda (despite being located outside the Caribbean Basin), British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and Turks and Caicos Islands.

To keep things as succinct as possible for the purposes of this paper with respect to defining the Anglo-Caribbean, we are drawing from and referencing research and studies in feminist geography, broadly defined, that have occurred in and about the region. Moreover, following the tradition of the *gayap*, a term used in Trinidad and Tobago as well as other Caribbean geographies to describe a form of mutual aid and freely associated shared labour in which members of a community work together to build something or solve a problem that is followed by a communal meal/nourishment, we will be recognizing work by authors, theorists, and activists who are anchored in, not to mention writing from, both the basin and diaspora. Finally, where we discuss how and why feminist geography (as a sub-discipline, approach, and corpus of work) is being promoted/not promoted and taught/not taught across the Anglo-Caribbean, we refer to more readily identifiable fixed locales and specific sites and institutions that are situated within the English-speaking Caribbean.

Feminist Geography in the Anglo-Caribbean

Regrettably, within the vast majority of the Anglo-Caribbean's academic institutions,

databases, syllabi, classrooms, and even day-to-day conversations, there remains a dearth of feminist geography. Fortunately, there is some feminist geography to be gleaned in the region. That which has and continues to crop up remains rich in both insight and instruction. Sample offerings range from transnational feminist praxis in Guyana (Peak and De Souza 2010) to participatory video in Barbados (Richardson-Ngweny 2012) to the ethics of research practice in Jamaica (Mullings 2005b). Critical methodological literature of this nature dovetails with empirical work focusing on queer theory and sexualities in Trinidad (Puar 2008), the gendered politics of professional workplaces in Jamaica (Mullings 2005a), women's roles in the historical political economy of British Guiana (Trotz and Peake 2000), the impact of corporate extractivism on Indigenous women in Guyana (Colchester and La Rose 2010), and conservation efforts and local knowledge in Trinidad and Tobago (Sletto 2005). These situated analyses provide grounded glimpses of everyday realties and structural issues in the Caribbean that are also being wrestled with in scholarship focusing on broad questions of insecurity (Noxolo and Featherstone 2014), difference (McKittrick and Peak 2005), the nexus of race-gender-history (Momsen 1993), climate change and food security (Thomas-Hope 2016), development (Dunn 1999), gender roles (Le Franc, Bailey, and Branche 1998), and even masculinity (Clifford and Mains 2006). Notwithstanding the feminist frameworks these socio-geographical studies are built upon, it is safe to say that there remains ample room for more feminist geography within the Anglo-Caribbean.

Culpability for the lacuna of feminist geography in the region's higher education system is a consequence of both historical legacy and contemporary governance. Regarding the former, we must not forget that the Caribbean, for centuries, was rapaciously dispossessed, enslaved, and expropriated from by a multitude of anti-Black, anti-Indigenous imperialists (with recognition that being Black and being Indigenous are not mutually exclusive). Societies, cultures, ecosystems, and psychologies alike were penetrated, disordered, and extricated from towards an end of forging the region into disparate sites of quarantine and extraction. The aim and ambition of the colonizer, geopolitically and biopolitically, was to deracinate and then transform the Caribbean into a carceral plantation-archipelago and "brothel" for the West (Fanon 1963, 102). Fostering political consciousness and gender justice amongst enslavers and imperialists themselves, as well as their human targets, was never present in modernity's crucible. There was, correspondingly, a vested interest and great deal of effort put into ensuring that neither education, nor the ideas of Black, Brown, Creole, and Indigenous people took root and flourished. That the vast majority of the societal architects-cum-field overseers responsible for such suppressions of learning and critical thought were men wielding puritanical, capitalist, and authoritarian modes of thinking is telling, and should give pause for thought and reflection. Particularly with respect to the gendered power relations and plantation logics, and Western/paternalistic modes of governing that continue to reverberate and function across the region.

Regarding the latter, it is enough to say that old habits, and male-dominated hierarchies, die hard. The same goes for heterosexist behaviours, rationales, and respectability politics, as well as colonially-ingrained performances of bourgeois decorum and classist professionalism. Meaning, the aspirations for gender equity, critical self-reflection, actually-existing democratic processes, and social relations free from all forms of domination, all hallmarks of feminist praxis (and geography), were

neither pre- nor post-independence mandate for most institutions in the Anglo-Caribbean. The discipline of Geography in the region has also not been immune to these tendencies.

Take for example, The University of the West Indies ("The UWI"). Founded in 1948, The UWI is the "largest and longest standing higher education provider in the English-speaking Caribbean." It serves 18 countries and territories, manages three physical campuses (Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago), offers an online "Open Campus," and has an enrolment of over 45,000 students. Historically, The UWI at Mona, Jamaica was founded as a subsidiary of the University of London, while The UWI in St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago (previously the "Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture") was established as a training ground for white settlers to go forth and settle/occupy land, via farming, for the British Empire. At the time of this draft, a residence hall (Milner Hall) on campus still bears the name of white supremacist and co-engineer of South African apartheid, Alfred Milner. Notably, there are consultations taking place to change the name. [updated in proofs]

As the flagship university in the region with widespread reach, The UWI, which started advertising gender justice as a core value in 2017, contains Geography Departments that: 1) offer no core courses on gender or feminist theories/praxis; 2) continue to be male-dominated; 3) still rely upon and compare themselves to British benchmarks; and 4) are housed in corresponding faculties imbued with the similar dispiriting characteristics. Moreover, in a survey of house journals published within the faculties of each respective UWI Department of Geography (the Faculty of Science and Technology in Jamaica and the Faculty of Food and Agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago) no articles containing the term "feminist geography" or even "feminist" appeared.

The major point here is not to condemn an entire university or region for its masculinist-induced paucities (which by no means is unique to The UWI or Caribbean), but to shed light on a patriarchal reality in need of urgent structural change. And furthermore, to underscore the fact that state apparatuses, especially the administrators "leading," building legacies, and paying lip service to gender justice within them have some work to do in the way of providing concrete evidence of such pledges. We posit that a commitment to feminist geography can assist in getting there. It also goes without saying that, arguably, feminist analyses, organizing, and agitations have been occurring within-and-across the Caribbean for centuries. Whilst perhaps not explicitly in label, certainly in practice. With an overwhelming amount of these struggles being taken-up and advanced by Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean, and Indigenous women. It is paramount to acknowledge this ongoing history, particularly because we are using it as launching pad to both articulate an expanded notion and propose the proliferation of feminist geography in the region.

Undisciplining **Feminist Geography**

Now, in light of the disconcerting evidence laid out above, before we write off the entire Anglo-Caribbean as being inconsequential in the grand scheme of feminist geography, a closer look at the region does unveil reason for much optimism. That is, if one takes an *undisciplined* and anti-canonical point of view (Hawthorne and Meché 2016) it is readily evident that there is no shortage of feminist geography to be found in the English-speaking Caribbean. We note here, too, that feminist geography as a sub-discipline,

much like the discipline of Geography writ large, has historically been white and Euro-American-centric (Finney 2014). Race, patriarchy, and (neo)colonialism matter, still, particularly in the domain of knowledge production (Greenidge 2018). This, undoubtedly, factors into why feminist geography is not as robust in the region as it is in other places (e.g. the Global North and the West).

We are also not suggesting that feminist geography should be a bounded orthodoxy that "Others" ought to be seeking access to. Contrariwise, our conviction is that feminist geography should be thought of, and constantly made into a solidaristic field that is plural, porous, horizontal, undomesticated, and dynamic; never derivative, nor colonial. There are, indeed, feminist geographers from an eclectic array of personal, ideological, and disciplinary orientations. No one should claim an exclusive hold on defining the field. Our political aim with this piece, then, rather than merely submitting to readers a prosaic description of who is doing/not doing categorical "feminist geography" is to amplify the (expandable) emancipatory principles, politics, methods, and ethics that have come to characterize it. To see feminist geography both unsettled and stretched, as well as made relational, kaleidoscopic, and transformed into a metaphorical *gayap*, and see what emerges.

More readily, our stance is that scholarship in-and-from the Anglo-Caribbean, particularly that which is feminist, empirically-driven, and praxis-oriented need not explicitly name itself "geography" for us to see its (socio-, political-, cultural-, economic-, and historico-) geographical merits. A bit of relational thinking, subverting of rigid disciplinary silos, and discernment is really all that is needed to notice connections. In recognizing this, we readily admit that there is a tremendous amount of requisite work to do when it comes to creating and fostering more feminist geography in the Anglo-Caribbean. Pointedly, we feel it is neither the obligation, nor responsibility of Caribbean scholars and/or feminists (who are not geographers per se) to take up the mantle of raising feminist geography's profile in the region. Although we do like to think this would be convivially welcome. Our proposal is that the bulk of the labour associated with sowing the seeds of what possibilities and potentialities that feminist politics, ethics, and *geography* offers students and societies in the region should be taken up by the institutions and faculties that oversee geographers and Geography Departments (as well as related disciplines). Until these lessons are learned by university officials, we can nevertheless turn to the work of scholars, activists, authors, and organizers from/in the Anglo-Caribbean, feminist and/or otherwise, to see some heartening reflections.

And although "feminist geography" as a key term may not appear as frequently as one would hope across the Anglophone Caribbean, the critical and caring ethics, as well as political edge advocated by practitioners of feminist geography certainly are. And given that the penchants for gender justice, social transformation, cultural change, and environmental defense underpinning much of the work that carries the label feminist geography is undoubtedly present in some of the region's scholarship, we think it important to acknowledge and share it. In doing so, it is by no means an imposition of the term upon those we are citing above and below, as some may pass on their work being classified "feminist geography." Just as some may decline the individual labels "feminist" and/or "geography" outright. We see this as fine, whatever their rationale, and support them identifying with, against, or even just wholly ignoring such categories as their autonomy. Our purpose in mentioning non-geographers in relation to feminist geography is to simply signify that we recognize shared politics, convictions, strategies,

and tactics, as well as are offering solidarity and can relate to the political thrust of their insights and efforts. Regardless of what label(s) their work goes by.

Accordingly, the sections that follow will briefly outline how a diverse range of heterogeneous scholars, activists, and researchers are critically examining the historical trajectories of colonialism, patriarchy, racial capitalism, and identity construction in the Caribbean. We will also illustrate how Caribbean feminists and organizers are grappling with gendered notions of private and public space, as well as critiquing and re-valuing women's labour and care work in the region. Finally, we will review how Caribbean feminist scholarship contributes to feminist geographies through a survey of how women are resisting, negotiating, disrupting, responding to, and challenging the prevailing heterosexist ideologies that are operating in region via praxis, protest, and the occupation and reclamation of differing social spaces.

In order to acknowledge the potential synergies that feminist geography shares with critical knowledge production emerging apropos a broad array of Caribbean contexts, we can begin by pointing to the novel and evocative scholarship being offered by a host of transdisciplinary authors whose research is situated in the region. This includes the politics of creolization and coloniality in Guyana (Jackson 2012), Indigenous people's resistance to postcolonial state repression and corporate land-grabbing in Belize (Coc 2015), the complexities of sex work and tourism across the Caribbean (Kempadoo 2004), accounts of women-led revolts in post-emancipation Antigua (Lightfoot 2010); the impacts of climate change in Jamaica (Baptiste and Kinlocke 2015), Indigenous people's efforts in ecological protection (LaRose 2004) and analysis of heritage (Assing 2005), the historical and gendered intricacies of emancipation in Barbados (Newton 2000), and the nuances of Afro-Indigenous identity and memory in St. Vincent (Palmer 2014). These studies and authors are emblematic of evolving issues in Caribbean scholarship that provide readers a sense of why feminist geography matters, as well as what it can look like when undisciplined.

Caribbean feminists, too, have positioned women's relationship with waged labour as different from the experiences of most women from the Global North. Researchers and activists have addressed the "worker"/"housewife" juxtaposition, and continue to engage with a series of myths around women in the economy. Some of these include ideas that women are not critical to the economic and social development of particular societies, that women do not contribute significantly to the labour force, that the main function of women is to reproduce and care-take family, and that the nuclear family has been the Caribbean's standard family structure. Hodge (2002) debunks claims of women's position as being limited to private spaces, noting that "the bulk of the population in the Caribbean was brought here from Africa and India to provide labour" (Hodge 2002, 474). Indigenous women in the Caribbean, too, even prior to European colonialism, played major roles outside private contexts.

Similarly, Mohammed (1998) notes that the status of most Indian women was that of household or field labour, while Reddock (1994, 11) establishes that women came to the Caribbean to work, therefore historical and present understandings of women's positioning in private spaces, such as the home, is "burdened with myths and half-truths." Movements such as the 1935 strikes in St. Vincent, the 1937 Trinidad and Tobago labour riots, and the Jamaican labour protests of 1938 saw women workers and housewives take unwavering stands against multiple forms of economic oppression meted out by empire. This was especially true in Jamaica, where riots were heavily

populated by middle class women who were addressing “concerns with unemployed women and the hardships seamstresses face due to the importation of readymade dresses” (Sutton 1994, xii). Regrettably, there have been many attempts made to minimize the participation and role of women at these protests, but it highlights Caribbean women’s ability to be in solidarity across difference and mobilise publicly against unjust treatment of themselves and their communities.

Another key aspect of social progress in Caribbean related to one stream of political work in feminist geography emerged through the formation of several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that advance the economic and social well-being, as well as overall resilience, of Caribbean women. Historically, this has been a critical contribution towards improving the livelihoods of women chiefly because the issues addressed by NGOs became national priorities after interventions are made by women’s rights activists. Here, we point to the Housewives Association of Trinidad and Tobago and the Domestic Worker’s Union in Guyana, two groups established by women who fought for the rights of domestic workers within their respective countries. Their actions resulted in the formation of the Minimum Wages Board in Trinidad and Tobago and in the unionisation of domestic workers in Guyana (Mohammed 1986). Currently, NGOs such as the Grenada National Organization of Women, Network of NGOs for the advancement of women in Trinidad and Tobago, STRAW (Strengthening, Transforming, Restoring, Affirming, Young Women) Inc. Centre for Young Women in The Bahamas, and Women’s Issues Network of Belize support and educate women. As do organizations like the Amerindian People’s Association, Maya Leaders Alliance, Julian Cho Society, and National Garifuna Council, which intervene against oppressions faced by Indigenous women and girls.

Many women’s coalitions also lobby governments for the implementation of social, economic, and political rights guaranteed by law. Mothers in Black is an NGO in Guyana formed by mothers who have lost loved ones due to drunk and dangerous driving. The organization pushes the government of Guyana to enforce traffic laws on intoxicated driving. Another example is Raise Your Voice Saint Lucia, an NGO whose members actively lobby the government to review and implement legislation that protect women and girls from all forms of violence. These action-oriented groups, to name a few, are engaged in eliminating gender inequality, as well as co-creating the cultural contexts and social spaces they, as women, would like to exist in.

Work on violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence and intimate partner violence was and remains a high priority for NGOs in the Anglophone Caribbean. Notable groups include the St. Lucia Crisis Centre, Cedars Home (Grenada), Help and Shelter (Guyana), Women’s Resource Centre (Bermuda), the Cayman Islands Crisis Centre and the Organization for Abused and Battered Individuals (Trinidad and Tobago). These organizations provide protection, counselling services, and resources to survivors of gender-based violence, lobby respective governments for policy changes and implementation, and manage rigorous awareness campaigns in an effort to raise social consciousness and end violence against women and girls. This work is vital within the Caribbean, where violence has been woven into the social fabric of modern society from inception (Morgan and Youssef 2006, 10).

Within a multi-ethnic Caribbean context, activists and scholars confronting gender-based violence inevitably also end up grappling with marginalizing norms and essentialist stereotypes associated with race, class, sexuality, and religion. For example,

images of Indo-Caribbean women as conservative and subservient (Hosein and Outar 2012) and prevailing tropes of representation pertaining to sexuality, diaspora, and tourism (Nixon 2015) are being contested, as is the militarization and racialization of impoverished communities in which Afro-Caribbean and Black women reside (Thomas 2016). Regional feminist establishments are vital in taking up this work as well. The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) and Code Red for Gender Justice each build solidarity and encourage collaboration across borders, particularly on issues of sexual violence and homophobia.

This work includes activism in both offline and online spaces. The most recent regional feminist engagement in online activism occurred in November 2016 with the hashtag #LifeInLeggings. Here, young women in the region took to social media to share experiences of sexual violence and abuse. The hashtag started in Barbados and quickly spread across a multitude other Caribbean countries as women shared experiences of rape, incest, cat calling, street harassment and other forms of sexual harassment and violence. The online movement then sparked marches across eight Caribbean countries in March of 2017 (coinciding with International Women's Day), where protesters called for the end to all forms of violence against women and girls.

Conclusion

The aim of this piece has been to provide a glimpse into the state of feminist geography in the Anglo-Caribbean. In doing so, we synopsized work that has been completed by feminist geographers, presented an analysis of the historical, structural, and institutional obstacles of why it has and is not being practiced more often, and suggested to readers that it can be seen from undisciplined and anti-orthodox vantage points. In addition, we endeavoured to highlight how Anglo-Caribbean women actively attempt to make sense of their material experiences and life chances as postcolonial, multi-cultural, and ethnically diverse actors and agents across-and-within the varying geographies within which they are situated.

Notably, our emphasis was placed on how Caribbean scholars, activists, authors, and organizers are confronting and transforming (across public and private spaces) unequal socio-economic realities, androcentric worldviews, coercive religious and cultural mores, and heteropatriarchal norms that permeate many of the region's political institutions and bureaucratic systems. To end, we suggest that the ground is fertile for feminist geography in the Anglo-Caribbean. There is both troubling and uplifting evidence of this. The target going forward is to encourage and support future feminist geographers, be they carrying the banner or not, to continue researching, exposing, challenging, contesting, and changing any-and-all of the oppressive gendered places, power relations, and hierarchies that exist across the region, whether it be via policy, protest, or *gayap*.

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